

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Five Times Amended) A method for inhibiting the degradation of mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, comprising:

placing the specimen into a container in the absence of any degradation-inhibiting agents, wherein the face coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics,

wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which once activated, degrades the mammalian natriuretic peptides.

5. (Three Times Amended) A method for inhibiting the degradation of mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, comprising:

placing the specimen into a container in the absence of aprotinin, wherein the face coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics,

wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which once activated, degrades the mammalian natriuretic peptides.

6. (Four Times Amended) A method for measuring mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, comprising the steps of:

placing the specimen into a container in the absence of any degradation-inhibiting agents, wherein the face coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics, wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which once activated, degrades the mammalian natriuretic peptides; and

measuring the mammalian natriuretic peptides by standard means.

Please add the following claims:

9. A method for inhibiting the degradation of mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, consisting of:

placing the specimen into a container in the absence of any degradation-inhibiting agents, wherein the face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics,

wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which once activated, degrades the mammalian natriuretic peptides.

10. A method for inhibiting the degradation of mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, consisting of:

placing the specimen into a container in the absence of aprotinin, wherein the face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics,

wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which once activated, degrades the mammalian natriuretic peptides.

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11. A method for measuring mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, comprising the steps of:

placing the specimen into a container in the absence of any degradation-inhibiting agents, wherein the face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics,

wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which once activated, degrades the mammalian natriuretic peptides; and

measuring the mammalian natriuretic peptides by standard means.